The Symbolism of Archery

IN THE BEGINNING there was no war, for all things were one in Dea, and conflict could not arise. The descent into manifestation is inevitably, in one sense, a descent into war: that is, the primordial Unity of unmanifest Wholeness is broken, and conflict enters into the now-manifest cosmos.

Nonetheless, it is true to say that physical war was unknown until a very late stage in human history. War between maid and maid was quite alien to the vast majority of "matriarchal" human civilisations, as it is in Aristasia. In the first Golden Age, war raged continually, but it was waged directly against the forces of darkness on the psychic and spiritual levels. This is the authentic archetype of war —the Vikhail, or true Holy War; and from this all the glory and nobility later associated with physical battle derives. It is still fought by every contemplative and mystic.

As time wore on and the descent into matter continued, the Enemy began to take on physical or quasi-physical forms. So also did the forces of good. It is from this period, many thousands of years ago, that the "mythological" creatures — dragons, centaurs, unicorns, etc. — found in legends throughout the world, have their origin. Later still, the forces of evil began to incarnate themselves in human civilisations — in the decadent "matriarchal" and proto-patriarchal states. It is in this period the Holy War descends fully to the physical level and maid first fights with maid. Finally, in the Kali yuga or Age of Iron, physical war becomes a condition of life. Kali yuga is known as the "age of quarrels" or conflicts. It is also the age when masculine images of Deity first arise and later become dominant over feminine ones.

Increasingly, all remnants of the true Holy War are lost, and war becomes merely a manifestation of the chaos and discord of the Age of Iron. This continual conflict is the inverse parody of the fact that the true soul is constantly at war with the discordant forces within her until she wins through to the primordial peace of Union with God.

There is an inverse ratio between earthly and heavenly war. The more strongly the true Holy War is fought, the more there is peace on earth among maids. The more peace is made with the forces of darkness, the more war spreads upon the earth. But there are times when the Holy War and earthly war are one. And here we may know the Holy War from profane war by the fact that its very heart is peace. Just as the heavenly war is fought in order to regain the Primordial peace of divine union, so the Holy War on earth is fought to end disruptions in the thamë or harmony of the world, and to restore the *Chrysothemis*, the Golden Order of earthly life lived according to Divine Law.

And just as the Holy War ends in peace, so it proceeds from peace, for all the vikhelic (martial) arts of Sattwic civilisations are essentially contemplative disciplines. Skill in the

arts of war depends not upon physical strength, but upon the spiritual force generated by contemplation. It is a symptom of the descent into matter that patriarchal war has become increasingly dependent upon physical strength; first that of the body, and then of increasingly powerful devices, culminating in today's nuclear arsenals.

From the foregoing, we may expect that archery, like all traditional crafts, has a profound metaphysical significance. Indeed, archery, since it corresponds to the element of air and to the intellectual Path of Light is in many respects the most strictly metaphysical of all the martial arts.

The drawn bow is a paradigm of the peace from which the Holy War, and indeed all manifestation, proceeds; for all the tensions are held in equilibrium. Balanced in harmony are the three gunas, or cosmic "strains": the upward tension or tendency, called Sattwa — that which strives toward the light; the downward, called Tamas, which pulls toward darkness and obscurity; and the outward or fiery tendency of Rajas. It is from the interplay of these three gunas that all manifestation takes its rise. Thus the loosing of the arrow, in which the three strains are simultaneously released, mirrors the act of manifestation.

Envisaged from another and profounder point of view, the arrow is the "winged soul" of the archer, trapped within the contrary tendencies of matter. It is the task of the archer to wholly identify herself with the shaft in its flight toward the target, which is none other than the spiritual Sun Herself.

It may be noted that in the first symbolism, the World—Axis runs vertically through the bow, connecting Heaven (the extreme point of the direction of Sattwa) with Hell (the extreme point of the direction of Tamas); whereas in the second it runs horizontally from the archer, who is Primordial Maid in her central, or Axial, position, with the heart of the solar Target.

The virtue of archery has to do with straightness, or accuracy. To "hit the mark" is to be saved, while to miss is to deviate, to go astray, to sin. Archery has traditionally been the Royal Art, and the princess-archer mounted on her chariot is a familiar traditional picture. Thus the lndo-European and proto-Aristasian root word *rju* meaning "straight" is the source of the Aristasian words *rayin* and *raia*, both meaning "queen", and also of *ranya*, *raihir*, and many words that we share with Telluria, such as *raj*, *Reich*, royal, regal, right and rectify.

The moving chariot being a symbol of the world [Dea volente, we shall publish a piece on the Chariot in the near future] , the royal archer leaves the flux of matter in her contemplative identification with the winged arrow and flies into the heart of the spiritual Sun. The bow itself may represent the duality of matter, its two arms signifying all the opposing pairs - light and dark, pleasure and pain etc. — between which the soul must pass in order to reach the Goal, while the grip represents the Middle Way, or narrow path through which she must travel. Of similar Significance are those tests in which the archer must shoot an arrow through a keyhole or "needle's eye", or else must split the first arrow down the middle with a second.

In other tests there are obstacles between the archer and target which must be penetrated. Here the symbolism is that of cleaving through ignorance, and hence the association of wisdom with "penetration"*. By the same symbolism, a strave (contemplative — cognate with *straff:* "straight") on the Path of Light may be

described as “far-shooting”, an epithet
which compare with “Far-Darter”, a title of Artemis from Homeric times.

In certain royal ceremonies, the Rayin would shoot an arrow in each of the four cardinal directions, thus establishing her rule over the entire land in the Name of Dea. This Rite reflects the supernatural archery of Jana, the wonderful archer in which the four quarters are pierced by a single arrow. In this, the archer stands as the quintessence, or fifth element, at the centre of the other four, and the arrow, ringing the quarters, transforms the square (symbolic of matter) into a circle (symbolic of Spirit). The symbolic significance of this feat is closely related to that of a hemispherical dome surmounting a square building.

In some versions of this legend, a thread is attached to the arrow, recalling the passage which describes the Mother as “the Sun Whose ray doth bind us all like jewels upon a string”. The words “ray” and “rayin” are closely related, for the rayin is a straight “ray”, or manifestation of God’s Light on earth, insofar as she acts wholly in Her Name and in conformity with the Law of thamë. The arrow is here associated with the needle, and its flight-end with the “eye”, the four quarters being “sewn together”. Thus we border upon the solar symbolism of the needle and of sewing, which takes us beyond our present theme.

Having briefly considered a little of the symbolism of the Royal Art, let us call upon one further legend to remind ourselves of the limits of this knowledge. When rivals wished to take Jana’s place as princess, each of them in turn was invited to draw her bow, and none could bend it even by a fraction, yet Jana immediately loosed four arrows to the four ends of the earth without the smallest effort. As in the drawing of the Sword of Truth, the requirement is not physical strength, but firstly purity, and most importantly a deep contemplative understanding and realisation. Without that understanding, and without having become wholly one with the winged arrow in its flight into the heart of the Sun, we can never hope to draw Jana’s bow, however great may be our theoretical knowledge of symbolism. But having achieved it we shall be able, like the Amazonian Ranya-archers of old, both physically and metaphysically, to cleave one arrow in two with another, at a distance of five hundred paces, blindfold.

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* This has to do with the important metaphysical doctrine that "all learning is remembering" (cf *The Feminine Universe,* p. 63 note 5) and that the act of coming to know Truth is fundamentally a negative one — that of cleaving through the veil of illusion that keeps us from it. Return

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